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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/02/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [EPET](#) [XL](#) [TD](#)  
SUBJECT: T&T'S FOREIGN MINISTER PREVIEWS CARICOM  
INTERSESSIONAL MEETING AGENDA

Classified By: DCM, Eugene P. Sweeney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Foreign Minister Gift previewed the agenda for the February 9-10 CARICOM Interseasonal meeting. Gift expects PetroCaribe will generate significant debate at the meeting. He also anticipates that CARICOM's relations with Haiti will warm some after the meeting. Gift inquired about the upcoming CARICOM Foreign Ministers' meeting with Secretary of State Rice, and floated the idea that it could

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take place in Port of Spain in March (See action request in paragraph 8). END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) Ambassador Austin met with Trinidad and Tobago Foreign Minister Gift on February 1 to discuss the upcoming CARICOM Interseasonal meeting, slated for February 9-10 in Port of Spain. Poloff attended as notetaker, as did three representatives from the MFA's Multilateral Division. Gift explained that the Interseasonal meeting is designed to amalgamate the reports of all the CARICOM meetings and councils and to set the agenda for the next CARICOM Summit.

¶3. (C) Gift pointed out that PetroCaribe is a CARICOM concern, because it seems that some countries have signed it in violation of the principle of consensus. Further, Gift noted that the CARICOM Energy Stabilization Fund could not be used to pay Venezuela for the PetroCaribe shipments. Rather than a discussion of problems with PetroCaribe, Gift stated that it will be addressed as an update by those who have signed on and benefited from the deal. He expects it to generate "quite a bit of debate."

¶4. (C) Gift assured Ambassador Austin that the Interseasonal meeting is for members only, but that by tradition CARICOM invites an extra-regional head of government to the regular session. Gift noted that this is one of the items to be discussed at the Interseasonal.

¶5. (C) Gift then turned to the proposed CARICOM Foreign Ministers' meeting with Secretary of State Rice. Gift noted that they would like a little more time to finalize the agenda for the meeting, proposing early March as a convenient time for the meeting (no specific dates were suggested). He also floated the idea of holding the meeting in Port of Spain, rather than in Nassau. Ambassador Austin assured him that he would inquire about the Secretary's availability.

¶6. (C) Ambassador Austin raised the issue of Haiti/CARICOM relations in light of Interim Prime Minister Latortue's visit to Trinidad and Tobago. Gift replied that he was getting ready to go to Haiti this week, with the Foreign Ministers of the Bahamas and Dominica. He also emphasized that T&T had

been engaging Haiti at the highest level in spite of CARICOM intransigence because of St. Vincent and St. Lucia. He noted that CARICOM decided to send election observers and hinted that the Intersessional meeting would also discuss Haiti/CARICOM relations.

17. (C) COMMENT: Gift was more open about the upcoming CARICOM meeting than anyone else in the Foreign Ministry has been. Gift understands Post's interest in CARICOM's operations and we will follow up on his offer to identify a working-level CARICOM point person. The Director of the CARICOM Department in the MFA has been away from the office, making it difficult for Post to obtain information about CARICOM meetings. END COMMENT.

18. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Please advise if the Secretary would be amenable to meeting with the CARICOM Foreign Ministers in Port of Spain in early March.

AUSTIN